

Sometimes, It's the Simple Things

II Kings 5:1-14; I Corinthians 9:24-27; Mark 1:40-45; Psalm 30 2-15-09

In the church year, when following the Lectionary, we encounter segments of time known as “Ordinary Time.” We know we have entered these times when the color of the frontal, the communion table cloth, the bookmark and my stole are green. The colors are not part of a decorating scheme, they have meaning.

During “Ordinary Time” there is no set theme for our scripture readings like there is during Advent, Christmas, Lent, which begins on February 25 with Ash Wednesday, Easter or Pentecost. It is a time when we explore a variety of scriptures, some we might remember from years before and some that are new to us.

This morning, among our readings, is the story of Naaman. This is one of my favorite stories.

We are told that Naaman is a mighty, powerful military leader. Often people who are powerful walk around in an arrogant state imagining that they know everything and that they can control everything. We can be fairly certain, from our tale, that Naaman had this unfortunate attitude.

However, there was a small chink in his arrogance when it came to the disease with which he was dealing—leprosy. Now, leprosy could be any number of skin ailments in our Bible, not just the one we understand as terribly disfiguring and known as Hansen’s disease. We are not certain just what his illness was, but we know it bothered him and that he wanted to be healed of it.

Enter a nameless person in our scriptures, young woman who had been captured by the Syrians from Israel during battle. Noting her master’s concern with his disease, the servant girl told her mistress that she knew of a prophet in Israel who might be able to cure him. Naaman, in his desperation, told the king this and he was sent to Israel to find this healer.

So, Naaman went. But, his arrogance almost tripped him up. Had it not been for the little people with him, his servants who loved him, he might not have been cured. Naaman felt offended when Elisha did not come out of his house and meet him and tell him how to be cured face to face. He couldn’t imagine that a river in Israel could be better than one in his own land for healing him. He felt slighted. But, calmer voices prevailed, reminding him that, sometimes, it is the simple things that produce the best results in life. So, he followed the instructions the prophet had given him, dipped himself seven times in the Jordan and emerged with fresh, new skin. Naaman went on to be converted to believing in the one, true God of Israel.

We might miss the simple things in life when we think we have all the answers and when we put on our blinders, forgetting that those around us and beside us, who care about us, know a thing or two and deserve to be heard out. We always need to be careful of forming opinions and writing them in concrete in our hearts and on our brains while refusing to consider any option that is not our own about a particular situation, decision or person. When we become terribly inflexible we develop a sort of leprosy of our own, that of our souls. We can cure this by becoming patient, good listeners to all sides of a story, processing this input and then moving forward.

People who came to Jesus to be healed most often came of their own accord after hearing of him and processing the information. They believed he could help them. There are times when our stories about him in the gospels tell us he could not. But, most of the time, wonders were worked.

This morning it is a leper who is healed—a nice tie in with Naaman. This was probably a little man, one who did not command troops and respect. He is nameless but, we are told, he rejoices in being made whole and clean once again. If one was a leper he or she was subject to banishment—it was a ritual impurity and a cure had to be recognized by a priest so a person would be restored to his or her rightful place in the community. Jesus warned him to tell no one who had worked this healing. But, of course, the man in his extreme joy could not contain himself. So, just what Jesus had hoped would not happen, happened, many, upon hearing of this healing, came after him seeking his help.

There are a couple of reasons Jesus might have wanted to escape recognition for being a physical healer. One was that he had much to do and much to teach. He did not want to attract the powers that were to what he was about too early in his ministry. Someone too popular, who might have been seen as a troublemaker, would be shut down by the authorities long before the work of God was finished. The other reason was that Jesus did not want to be inundated by people who sought only physical healings. His major emphasis was to get people to think about the condition of their souls and their relationships with God and then to move forward on spiritual journeys.

We are all human and would, most likely, react as the healed man did, unable to keep from telling everyone our own good news. It was a big event—miracles often are. But, we need to remember that the most lasting joy is often found in the quiet, simple things in life that bring us wholeness. We tend to overlook acts of kindness, like those of Naaman's servants, because we are always seeking things that are bigger and better. We want to live large and be important, whatever that means, so we lose track of what should be nearest and dearest to our hearts.

The plane crash on Thursday night should remind us that life is short and fragile and we never know when it will be over for ourselves or for those we care about. We never know when the last word or action toward another will be, indeed, the last word or action. We never know when we carry around angry, dismissive thoughts toward someone else if we will ever be able to correct them. We never know when, in our arrogance and narrowness of mind, we issue a judgment about another person, if we will ever have the time to reflect on it and find in that person the goodness that dwells there.

Naaman was blessed by having a tiny opening in his shell of superiority that allowed him to finally understand that life was not all about him and his needs. There was for him, and there is for us, a broader picture we are called to consider in life. Sometimes it is the simple things that make life worth living—the human touch, the smile, the kind and thoughtful words, the works that enrich life in subtle ways. Never miss doing and seeing those simple things that bring the love of God to us and that allow that love to shine through us.

-- Amen